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Field Station Under Threat

by
Paul Faulstich

As reported in the last issue of *The Other Side*, The Bernard Biological Field Station of the Colleges is slated to be the site of the Keck Graduate Institute, the newest (but yet unbuilt) addition to the Claremont Consortium. With Pitzer casting the sole dissenting vote, the Claremont Colleges approved construction of the Keck Institute on eleven acres of the 85 acre Field Station. At the time (1997), the Policy Council of the Claremont University Center acknowledged that the Field Station's "role as an important contributor to the academic programs of The Colleges is now clearly recognized," and that "the field station has been assured of increased emphasis and resources by The Colleges." This sounded like an unfortunate but realistic compromise; the Keck Institute would sacrifice eleven acres of the Field Station, but the remaining lands would be preserved as a working biological field station with greater support from the Colleges.

That was then.

Now, the threat of losing the Field Station looms large. At first, things looked hopeful: A draft version of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) listed as its number one biological recommendation that the remaining field station lands be preserved in perpetuity. This was a sensible recommendation, but one that appears to have been met with resistance by the presidents of

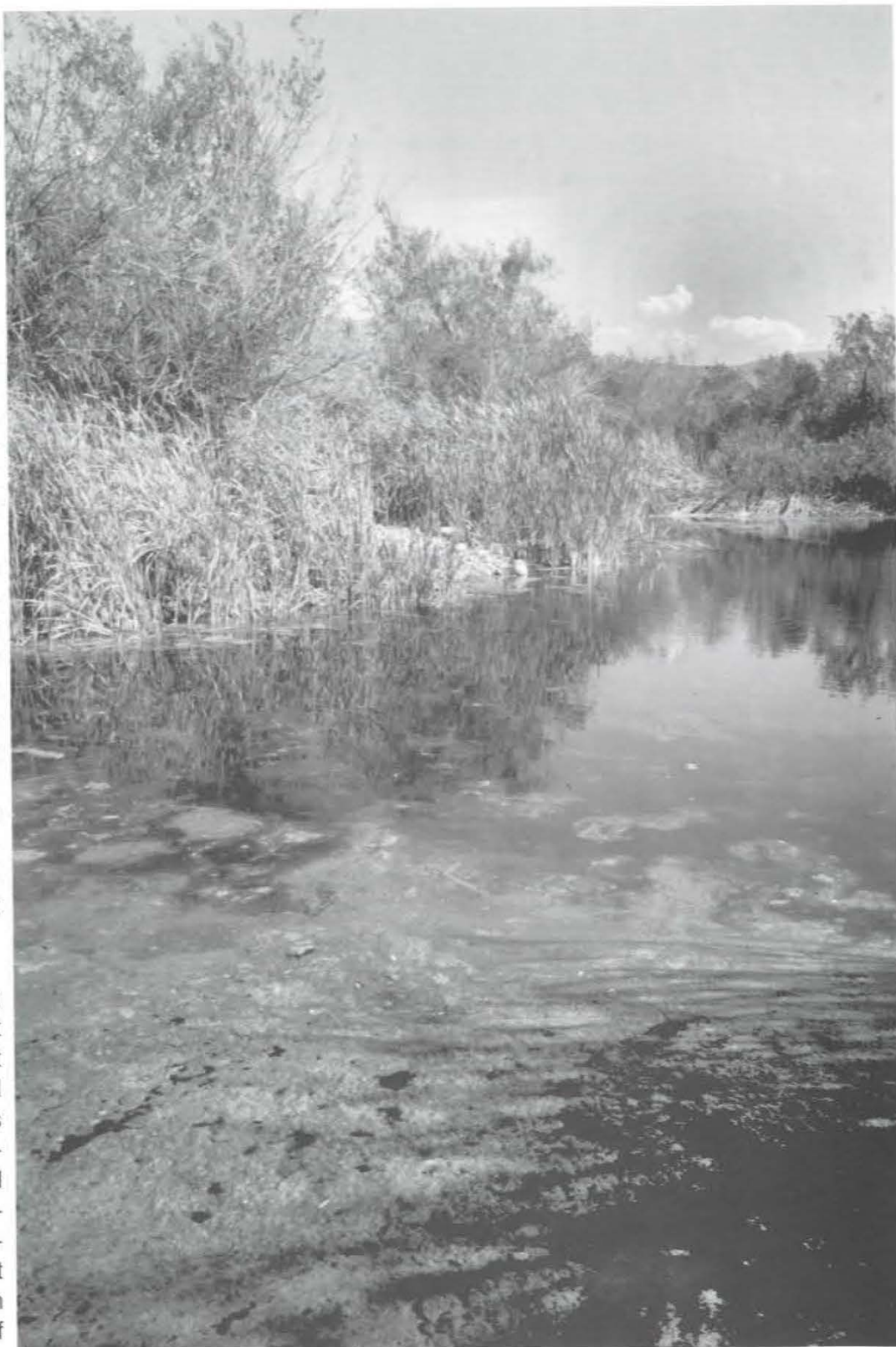


figure 1. pHake Lake at Bernard Biological Field Station

the Claremont Colleges and/or the Policy Council (made up of the College's presidents and the chairs of the boards of trustees).

The public version of the Environmental Impact Report was not available as this issue of *The Other Side* was going to press, but by the time you read this the final EIR will have been released. According to the City Manager's office, the EIR available for public scrutiny will list NO recommended mitigations! According to the City, they found the development unmitigatable (meaning that there is no way to lessen its impacts), so they "will have discussions with the College's about other lands that might be set aside in compensation." This means that if the EIR is approved as it apparently reads (I have not seen the final draft version), preservation of the Field Station will not be mandated, and the Claremont Colleges will be free to recommend future development on the land. This, of course, is just what the College's (save for Pitzer) seems to want; unmitigatable development!

So, has it been lip service all along? Was the Colleges' promise of "optimizing future viability of field studies on the field station" insincere? It appears so. It seems as though the Presidents and the Deans are reneging on their earlier confirmation of the importance of the Field Station to our students' education. After all, it sounded almost too good to be true when the Policy Council issued the statement that "Additional discussions will be held with the field station faculty directors...on how to minimize any direct adverse impact of development and how to enhance the management and operation of the remaining lands to support the academic mission of The Claremont Colleges." This is the rhetoric, but where is the action!?

Since the land set-aside was the only significant biological mitigation in the draft that I saw, there is nothing left that protects the Field Station. There's no way the Colleges can get away without mitigating the habitat loss, but this can be in the form of agreeing to set aside other land holdings. Not only has the recommendation to preserve the remainder of the Field Station been deleted, but the draft contains NO mitigation recommendations at all. Apparently, the thrust of the new EIR is to set aside lands elsewhere in compensation. Needless to say, this is rather unsettling, and the community needs to formulate an appropriate response.

Pitzer's College Council adopted the following resolution at its May 2, 1996 meeting:

Pitzer College opposes development of the Bernard Biological Field Station (BFS). As a community, we are advocates of ecological preservation, especially of the threatened habitat and fragile ecosystem of the BFS. We affirm that the fullest educational value of the BFS lies in the use, preservation, and restoration of this undeveloped land.

This was a bold and visionary statement, but unless we reaffirm our commitment, the Field Station will likely be available for future development. At a time of increasing need for training in the field sciences (a need reflected in a rapid growth rate for the educational use of biological field stations), it is terribly shortsighted to reduce the viability of an already small research station.

The time to act is NOW! We must rally together to ensure that the remaining Field Station lands are preserved. Talk with your friends about your concerns, and keep your ears open for notices of town meetings (one will be sponsored soon by the Ecology Center). Go to City Hall or the Public Library and look over the Environmental Impact Report. Protest. Rally. Write letters. Testify at public hearings. The dates for the public hearings have been set, and it is critical that concerned citizens show up in mass to express solidarity on this issue, and to ensure that ecological, social, and educational justice be served. The first public hearing will be with the Planning Commission (scheduled for April 6), followed by the Traffic Commission hearing (on April 22), and the Architectural Commission hearing (on April 28). Information on times and locations will be announced, but mark your calendars now, and make the commitment to attend and to raise your voice! It is the city that will make final decisions in response to the recommendations of the EIR. Acting on our ideals, we must encourage the City to not be co-opted by development interests within the Colleges. The future of the Field Station is up for grabs; our actions can help preserve this little gem of coastal sage scrub. As the semester heats up, and as deadlines for papers and exams approach, consider the words of Edward Abbey: "Sentiment without action is the ruin of the soul."

Let us stand in our commitment, rooted like a tree; let us meander in our perspectives, fluid like the waters. Let us find justice for all. And long live the Field Station!

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